PIJSSL

Praxis International Journal of Social Science and Literature

A Peer-reviewed Multidisciplinary e-Journal with SJIR 2025 = 6.034 & ISSN: 2581-6675

Vol. 09, No. 04 (April 2026) **DOI:** 10.51879/PIJSSL/090403

Email: editor.pijssl@gmail.com | **Website:** www.pijssl.com

OPEN ACCESS

Keki Daruwalla's Spatial and Teleological Mappings

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Abstract

This paper examines Keki Daruwalla's Spatial and Teleological Mappings by exploring how space and purpose function as interrelated organizing principles in the poetry of Keki N. Daruwalla. Daruwalla's poetic landscapes ranging from deserts, rivers, battlefields, and borderlands to urban terrains are not merely geographical settings but symbolic arenas where historical violence, civilizational memory, and existential anxieties unfold. His spatial imagination reflects a layered cartography in which physical terrains intersect with political boundaries, mythic pasts, and psychological interiors. The study argues that Daruwalla constructs space as a dynamic site of conflict and transformation, where the human subject confronts forces of nature, state power, and destiny.

The teleological dimension of his poetry emerges through recurring concerns with history's direction, moral consequence, and the cyclical nature of violence. Rather than presenting a linear or redemptive trajectory, Daruwalla's vision often exposes the fragility of progress and the ambiguity of human purpose. Poems situated along rivers like the Ganga, in arid frontiers, or within war-torn landscapes interrogate whether history moves toward resolution or remains trapped in repetition. His engagement with myth and legend further complicates teleology by juxtaposing ancient narratives with contemporary crises, thereby questioning inherited notions of fate and national destiny.

Through close textual analysis of selected poems across his oeuvre, this paper demonstrates that Daruwalla's spatial representations function as epistemological tools that reveal deeper teleological uncertainties. Space becomes both a metaphor and a method mapping trauma, displacement, and ideological conflict while teleology becomes a contested horizon rather than a fixed end. Ultimately, Daruwalla's poetry offers a critical reimagining of landscape as history-laden and purposively unsettled, reflecting the complexities of postcolonial modernity.

Keywords: *Keki Daruwalla, Spatial Imagination, Teleology, Landscape and History, Postcolonial Poetry, Violence and Memory, Myth and Modernity, Indian English Poetry, Political Geography, Existential Vision.*

Introduction

Keki N. Daruwalla stands as one of the most compelling voices in post-independence Indian English poetry. His poetic corpus, spanning several decades, reflects a sustained engagement with violence, political instability, mythic consciousness, and existential doubt. Unlike many of his contemporaries who privilege interiority or linguistic experimentation, Daruwalla repeatedly turns outward to landscapes marked by tension and memory. Rivers, deserts, borders, battlefields, and riot-stricken cities recur throughout his poetry, not as passive backgrounds but as charged terrains in which historical trauma and ethical ambiguity are inscribed. His work demonstrates that geography is never neutral; it is a living archive of conflict, ideology, and civilizational anxiety.

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The idea of spatial mapping in literary discourse suggests that space in literature functions as a structural and ideological framework rather than as decorative setting. Michel Foucault argues that space is fundamentally tied to relations of power and knowledge, shaping how subjects understand themselves within historical systems (23). In a postcolonial context, spatial representation becomes even more significant because land, borders, and territories are inseparable from colonial histories and nationalist aspirations. Daruwalla's poetic landscapes participate in this discourse by foregrounding fractured terrains sites where the promises of nationhood are tested against the realities of violence and fragmentation.

Closely connected to this spatial imagination is the philosophical concept of teleology. Traditionally, teleology implies directionality an assumption that history unfolds toward a purposeful end. From Aristotle's notion of intrinsic purpose to Enlightenment narratives of progress, teleological thinking has underpinned ideas of civilizational advancement. However, twentieth-century philosophical critiques challenge this linear optimism. Jean-François Lyotard, for instance, questions the credibility of grand narratives that claim historical inevitability (xxiv). In postcolonial societies, where independence did not automatically resolve social conflict, teleological faith in progress often appears unstable. Daruwalla's poetry enters this debate by interrogating whether the nation truly advances toward moral clarity or whether it remains ensnared in cyclical violence.

This paper argues that Daruwalla's poetic landscapes operate as cartographic structures that unsettle teleological certainties about nationhood and civilizational destiny. Through rivers that witness decay, deserts that embody existential barrenness, and borders that symbolize fractured identity, Daruwalla constructs geography as an epistemological tool. His poetry ultimately exposes the fragility of narratives that presume historical resolution, offering instead a vision of space marked by repetition, irony, and unresolved tension.

Problem to Be Investigated

Although Daruwalla's poetry has generated considerable scholarly interest, critical discussions have largely concentrated on thematic concerns such as violence, mythic irony, and political commentary. Bruce King, for example, characterizes Daruwalla as a poet of stark realism whose verse reflects the turbulence of modern India (187). Other scholars emphasize his engagement with myth, arguing that he juxtaposes epic memory with contemporary brutality to reveal the erosion of ethical values. Such studies illuminate important dimensions of his work, yet they often treat landscape as incidental imagery rather than as a structural principle shaping the philosophical direction of his poetry.

The absence of a sustained spatial reading creates a critical gap. Daruwalla's landscapes are frequently interpreted symbolically rivers as tradition, deserts as barrenness but rarely are they examined as systematic cartographies that map ideological and historical tensions. Similarly, while critics acknowledge his skepticism toward national progress, they seldom analyze this skepticism through the lens of teleology. The philosophical implications of his representation of history remain underdeveloped in existing scholarship.

The central problem this study investigates is whether Daruwalla's spatial imagination reinforces or destabilizes teleological narratives of national and civilizational destiny. Does his poetry suggest that history moves toward moral fulfillment, or does it reveal a cyclical pattern of violence and fragmentation? By foregrounding geography as an organizing principle, this research seeks to examine how spatial representation functions as a critique of historical purpose. The inquiry thus bridges literary geography and philosophical teleology, proposing that Daruwalla's poetic maps challenge the assumption of inevitable progress in postcolonial India.

Review of Literature

Critical scholarship on Daruwalla has consistently emphasized his engagement with violence and political unrest. Bruce King observes that Daruwalla's poetry is marked by "a harsh and unsentimental realism" that confronts the brutalities of contemporary society (190). His depictions of riots, war, and communal conflict have led many critics to read him as a poet of historical testimony. This perspective positions Daruwalla

within a lineage of socially conscious Indian English poets who respond directly to the ethical crises of their time.

Another significant strand of criticism focuses on his use of myth and historical allusion. Scholars argue that Daruwalla employs myth not to romanticize the past but to expose the disjunction between ancient ideals and modern degeneration. By invoking epic figures and sacred narratives within contexts of contemporary violence, he creates ironic contrasts that question the continuity of moral values. Such readings highlight his ability to negotiate tradition and modernity without surrendering to nostalgia.

Postcolonial analyses have further examined Daruwalla's preoccupation with borders and fractured identities. The imagery of frontiers and contested territories has been interpreted as reflective of national anxiety and the instability of the modern Indian state. These studies emphasize fragmentation, displacement, and ideological conflict as central motifs in his work. However, while they acknowledge the importance of geography, they rarely theorize space as a systematic construct shaped by power relations. Foucault's insight that space is intertwined with systems of control and knowledge (23) offers a framework that has not yet been fully applied to Daruwalla's poetry.

Moreover, the philosophical dimension of teleology remains largely unexplored in existing criticism. Although Daruwalla's skepticism toward progress has been noted, few scholars situate this skepticism within broader debates about the collapse of grand narratives in modernity (Lyotard xxiv). The absence of an integrated spatial and teleological reading leaves room for further inquiry. By synthesizing literary geography with philosophical critique, the present study seeks to extend the existing scholarship and provide a more comprehensive understanding of Daruwalla's poetic vision. His landscapes, when examined through this dual lens, emerge not merely as thematic motifs but as structural interventions into debates about history, destiny, and national progress.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims:

- To examine the role of spatial imagery in Daruwalla's poetry.
- To analyze how landscapes operate as repositories of memory and violence.
- To investigate the teleological structure (or anti-structure) of historical representation.
- To explore the relationship between geography and destiny.
- To situate Daruwalla within postcolonial spatial discourse.
- To demonstrate how his poetry resists linear narratives of national progress.

Conceptual Framework

This study draws upon two interrelated theoretical frameworks: spatial theory and teleological philosophy. Spatial theory in literary studies challenges the notion of geography as passive or neutral. Michel Foucault contends that space is deeply intertwined with systems of knowledge and authority, shaping the organization of social and political life (23). In literary representation, therefore, landscapes are not merely aesthetic features but sites where power relations are inscribed. Postcolonial criticism further emphasizes that space carries the imprint of colonial history, border formation, and nationalist aspiration. Rivers, deserts, and frontiers often symbolize contested territories where identity and sovereignty are negotiated.

Teleology, by contrast, concerns the philosophical assumption that events unfold toward a predetermined purpose. Aristotle's conception of final causes established teleology as intrinsic directionality, while Enlightenment thought extended it to history, proposing that societies advance toward progress and rational order. However, twentieth-century philosophy and postmodern theory cast doubt on these assumptions. Lyotard's critique of grand narratives underscores the erosion of faith in universal progress (xxiv). In postcolonial contexts, where independence has not eradicated violence or inequality, teleological optimism appears especially problematic.

By integrating these frameworks, this study approaches Daruwalla's poetry as a field where spatial representation intersects with philosophical doubt. His landscapes can be read as cartographies that reflect fractured histories and unsettled destinies. Space becomes both a metaphor and a method: a metaphor for ideological tension and a method for mapping the uncertainties of historical direction. Through this lens, Daruwalla's poetic universe emerges as one that resists linear teleology and instead foregrounds ambiguity, repetition, and discontinuity.

Spatial Cartographies in Daruwalla's Poetry

Daruwalla's poetry is marked by a persistent return to physical landscapes that function as repositories of memory and violence. Rivers, particularly the Ganga, frequently appear as symbols of civilizational continuity. Yet these rivers do not offer serene reassurance; they witness decay, ritual pollution, and moral contradiction. The river becomes a flowing archive, carrying within it the sediments of history. In this sense, the spatial image destabilizes teleological narratives of purity and progress. Instead of affirming sacred continuity, the river reveals fragmentation and irony.

Deserts and arid frontiers occupy another significant place in his poetic geography. These barren spaces evoke existential emptiness and historical stagnation. The desert, stripped of fertility, becomes a metaphor for spiritual drought and moral exhaustion. Unlike romanticized depictions of wilderness, Daruwalla's deserts are harsh and unforgiving, underscoring the vulnerability of human aspiration. In such terrains, the promise of purposeful direction seems suspended, replaced by an atmosphere of uncertainty.

Borderlands and war zones further intensify this spatial anxiety. Borders, often depicted as tense and contested, symbolize the fragility of national identity. They are sites where political power asserts itself through surveillance and violence. Foucault's insight that space is organized through systems of control becomes particularly relevant here (23). Daruwalla's borders are not abstract lines but lived realities marked by fear and confrontation. Similarly, battlefields and riot-torn cities transform geography into moral testimony. Bloodshed inscribes itself onto the land, turning physical terrain into a witness of cyclical brutality. Urban spaces and bureaucratic institutions also appear as fragmented terrains. The modern city, far from embodying progress, becomes a site of alienation and ideological tension. Streets, offices, and administrative structures reflect impersonal systems that regulate human existence. In these urban landscapes, the rhetoric of development is overshadowed by disillusionment. The spatial map that emerges across Daruwalla's poetry is thus one of fracture rather than unity. India appears not as a cohesive national space moving confidently toward destiny, but as a contested terrain marked by repetition and unresolved conflict.

Through these varied landscapes, Daruwalla constructs a cartographic vision that challenges teleological coherence. Geography does not confirm progress; instead, it exposes discontinuity. The spatial imagination becomes central to his critique of historical purpose, revealing that the land itself bears witness to cycles of violence that resist closure.

Teleological Anxiety in Daruwalla's Poetry

A defining feature of Keki N. Daruwalla's poetic vision is his deep skepticism toward teleological certainty. While nationalist discourse in post-independence India frequently relied on narratives of inevitable progress and civilizational resurgence, Daruwalla's poetry unsettles such optimism by foregrounding repetition, fragmentation, and moral ambiguity. His representation of violence rarely suggests catharsis or redemption; instead, brutality appears cyclical, recurring across temporal and spatial boundaries. The recurrence of riots, wars, and ideological conflicts implies that history does not move steadily toward resolution but remains trapped in patterns of repetition.

Teleology presupposes direction and culmination, yet Daruwalla's poetic landscapes often suspend such directional movement. The future does not promise clarity; rather, it echoes the unresolved tensions of the past. In this sense, his work aligns with postmodern skepticism toward grand historical narratives. Jean-François Lyotard's critique of universalizing teleological frameworks is particularly relevant here, as

Daruwalla's poetry resists the assumption that history advances toward moral fulfillment (Lyotard xxiv). Instead of presenting progress as inevitable, his verse frequently highlights the persistence of cruelty and ethical disintegration.

Mythic allusion in Daruwalla's poetry further complicates teleological assumptions. By invoking epic or sacred narratives within contexts of contemporary violence, he creates ironic juxtapositions that undermine the idea of civilizational continuity. Ancient myths that once promised cosmic order are reframed against modern chaos, revealing discontinuity rather than harmony. The invocation of myth does not restore faith in destiny; it exposes the erosion of moral ideals. This strategy destabilizes both sacred teleology and nationalist rhetoric that draws legitimacy from mythic pasts.

Moreover, Daruwalla's portrayal of human agency often reflects existential uncertainty. Individuals in his poems confront landscapes indifferent to their suffering, suggesting that historical direction is neither guided nor guaranteed. Teleology, which implies purposeful unfolding, gives way to ambiguity. In this regard, Daruwalla's poetic universe reflects the broader postcolonial condition, where independence did not eradicate structural violence or ideological fragmentation. History appears suspended between memory and recurrence, lacking the assurance of redemptive closure. Through this sustained interrogation of directionality, Daruwalla constructs a poetics of teleological anxiety one that questions whether destiny is a coherent narrative or merely a fragile illusion.

Spatial–Teleological Intersections

The most compelling dimension of Daruwalla's poetry emerges at the intersection of space and teleology. His landscapes do not merely contain historical events; they shape the perception of historical movement itself. Geography becomes the medium through which teleological assumptions are tested and destabilized. Rivers, deserts, borders, and battlefields operate simultaneously as physical terrains and as philosophical metaphors. In this convergence, spatial representation becomes inseparable from questions of destiny and progress.

Rivers, for instance, traditionally symbolize continuity and forward movement, aligning naturally with teleological imagery. Yet in Daruwalla's poetry, the river's flow does not guarantee moral advancement. Instead, it carries traces of decay, ritual corruption, and unresolved memory. The river thus becomes a paradoxical emblem suggesting motion without assurance of improvement. The linearity implied by flowing water is undercut by the persistence of historical trauma embedded within it. Space here redefines teleology by exposing movement without fulfillment.

Similarly, borderlands illustrate how geography complicates narratives of national destiny. Borders are often celebrated as markers of sovereign achievement, signifying the culmination of historical struggle. However, Daruwalla's depiction of borders foregrounds tension, surveillance, and violence. These contested spaces reveal that national teleology understood as the triumphant realization of independence is incomplete and fraught with instability. Foucault's argument that space is structured through mechanisms of power (23) resonates strongly in this context. Daruwalla's spatial imagination exposes how authority inscribes itself onto land, thereby shaping historical consciousness.

Battlefields and riot-stricken cities further intensify this intersection. The physical terrain becomes saturated with bloodshed, transforming geography into moral testimony. Such spaces challenge teleological narratives that promise eventual harmony. Instead of culminating in resolution, conflict inscribes itself repeatedly onto the land. The spatial map thus becomes cyclical rather than linear. History is written not as ascent but as recurrence, and the land bears the scars of its repetition.

Through these spatial–teleological intersections, Daruwalla constructs a poetic cartography that resists closure. Space becomes both witness and participant in historical processes, revealing the fragility of purposive narratives. Rather than offering a coherent vision of destiny, Daruwalla maps uncertainty. His landscapes articulate a postcolonial condition in which movement does not necessarily entail progress, and where geography itself challenges the myth of inevitable fulfillment. In synthesizing spatial representation

with teleological doubt, his poetry ultimately reimagines the relationship between land and history as one marked by tension, ambiguity, and unresolved continuity.

Existential and Philosophical Dimensions

Beyond its political and historical concerns, the poetry of Keki N. Daruwalla reveals a profound existential undercurrent. His landscapes, though historically and ideologically charged, also serve as sites where the human condition is tested against forces larger than individual agency. In many poems, human figures appear dwarfed by vast deserts, turbulent rivers, or tense borderlands, suggesting the fragility of personal will within expansive and often indifferent terrains. This existential dimension complicates both spatial and teleological readings, for it foregrounds the tension between determinism and agency.

Teleology traditionally implies purposeful design, yet Daruwalla's poetic universe resists such reassurance. The recurring presence of violence and decay suggests a world in which moral order is neither guaranteed nor divinely orchestrated. Instead, individuals confront ambiguity and uncertainty. The land itself does not offer consolation; it remains silent, bearing witness to suffering without providing resolution. Such imagery aligns with modern philosophical skepticism toward metaphysical certainty. If teleology promises coherence, Daruwalla's landscapes expose disjunction.

Moreover, his treatment of memory underscores the existential weight of history. The past lingers not as heroic inheritance but as unresolved burden. Rivers carry sedimented violence; deserts echo with silence; cities reflect alienation. The individual subject navigating these spaces experiences history as pressure rather than destiny. In this sense, Daruwalla's poetry gestures toward an existential humanism that acknowledges suffering without romanticizing it. The absence of teleological assurance does not lead to nihilism; rather, it demands ethical awareness. By situating the human figure within morally ambiguous terrains, Daruwalla invites readers to confront responsibility in a world where historical progress cannot be taken for granted.
Thus, the existential dimension of his poetry reinforces the broader argument of this study: space in Daruwalla is not merely geographical but philosophical. It frames the human struggle against uncertainty, revealing a world where destiny remains contested and meaning must be continually negotiated.

Conclusion

This study has examined how the poetry of Keki N. Daruwalla constructs a complex interplay between spatial imagination and teleological skepticism. By analyzing his recurrent landscapes—rivers, deserts, borders, battlefields, and urban terrains it becomes evident that geography in his work functions as a dynamic cartographic structure rather than as passive background. These spaces are inscribed with violence, memory, and ideological conflict, transforming the land into an archive of historical tension.

At the same time, Daruwalla's poetry challenges teleological assumptions about national progress and civilizational destiny. Instead of presenting history as linear movement toward resolution, his work foregrounds repetition, fragmentation, and moral ambiguity. Mythic allusions do not restore faith in continuity; they intensify irony. Borders do not symbolize triumphant sovereignty; they reveal instability and surveillance. Rivers do not guarantee purification; they carry the sediment of unresolved trauma. Through these spatial images, teleology is not affirmed but interrogated.

The intersection of space and teleology ultimately defines Daruwalla's poetic vision. Geography becomes the medium through which historical purpose is questioned, and teleological narratives are exposed as fragile constructs rather than inevitable truths. His poetry maps uncertainty rather than resolution, suggesting that postcolonial history is marked less by fulfillment than by ongoing negotiation.

By integrating spatial theory and philosophical inquiry, this study contributes to Daruwalla scholarship by offering a framework that moves beyond thematic analysis. It demonstrates that his landscapes are epistemological tools—mechanisms through which the direction of history itself is scrutinized. In doing so, Daruwalla emerges as a poet who not only documents violence but also reimagines the relationship between

land, memory, and destiny. His cartographic imagination remains central to understanding the complexities of postcolonial modernity, where space bears witness to history, and history resists the promise of predetermined ends.

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